

smaller and having the ground color above buffy-brown rather than grayish-brown. All the lighter areas of the plumage (including crissum, under wing-coverts and lining of wings) suffused with pinkish buff.

Dimensions (average of eight adults): wing, 3.04; tail, 2.46; tarsus, 0.79; culmen, 0.46; bill from nostril, 0.31 inch.

HABITAT. Salem, Oregon.



NESTING OF THE PRAIRIE WARBLER, (*DENDROICA DISCOLOR*) IN THE VICINITY OF WASHINGTON, D. C.

BY ELLIOTT BAIRD COUES.

ALTHOUGH common throughout the District of Columbia, this beautiful little bird nests more abundantly in certain suitable localities than in others. One of these breeding-places was discovered by my friend, Mr. T. W. Richards, and myself last spring, and I have pleasure in laying before the readers of 'The Auk' the results of our joint observations.

The locality is along the Potomac River, on the Virginia side, about seven miles from the city, among some small hills from which all the large trees have been cut away, and which are now grown up to a thick scrub of hickory, dogwood, and laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), with here and there a few young pines and cedars. Here were found breeding within a small area an astonishing number of the birds, perhaps more than fifty pairs. On reaching the place, they could be heard singing on all sides, sometimes several at the same moment. Among them were a few Yellow-breasted Chats (*Icteria virens*), but our whole attention was directed to the Warblers. On our first visit, May 22, we found one nest; but on two subsequent visits, a week later, many more than we cared to take were easily found, with full sets of eggs. They were so numerous and so readily discovered that to take all we desired was simply a matter of walking about in the bushes. The nests were only a few feet from the ground, and were placed preferably in the hickory and dogwood bushes. Only three nests were found in the young pines, and one in a cedar bush. During the heat of the day the

birds—the males at any rate—seemed to seek the shade of the larger pines bordering the clearing where the nests were placed, as we heard many singing from the neighboring woods while we were rambling through the scrub.

From among the large number of nests taken I select for description five which illustrate the variations in construction and situation, adding some remarks on the behavior of the birds as they were robbed of their pretty homes in the necessary interests of science.

*Nest No. 1.* This is evenly placed upright in the triple prong of a low laurel bush, about two and a half feet from the ground. From among twelve nests, it is the only one symmetrically placed in a crotch, the others being all irregularly supported by twigs either branching at varying angles from a main stem, or, as in some cases, coming to the support of the nest from a different part of the bush. It is composed chiefly of dandelion down, in which are woven a few thin straws and dry leaves. It is lined with very fine bits of straw and a little horsehair. The brim is firm and smooth, as is the rule with the nests of the Prairie Warbler, but a little higher on one side than elsewhere, and is evenly turned of the same materials as the lining. The inside measurement is just about one and three quarters inches both in depth and in width. It contained four fresh eggs. The birds quickly returned after flushing, and while I was wrapping the eggs in cotton, preparatory to removing them with the nest, both parents hopped about very near me, showing apparently little anxiety for the fate of their treasures.

*Nest No. 2* is particularly neat and compact, with an even and exceptionally firm brim. It is made almost entirely of dandelion down, closely felted, and further secured with a few straws, and is stuccoed over outside with small dry leaves. The inside is copiously lined with red cowhair, making a marked color contrast with the other materials. It was placed about five feet from the ground, and fixed rather lightly in an irregularly three-pronged crotch, being further fastened to a spray of blackberry bramble which passed under it and between its side and one of the prongs of the crotch. The owners of this nest seemed much more concerned at the rifling of their home than the first pair, and fluttered close about my head, incessantly reiterating a single sharp note of distress. The nest contained four eggs.

*Nest No. 3* was placed in a very young pine, about one and a half feet from the ground. It is built against the upright main trunk (which is about as thick as one's finger), and is supported by two small diverging twigs, one of which is nearly under the nest, the other rising on one side of it. The body of this nest is of cotton-wool—probably some dropped by ourselves in an earlier visit; and with this as a basis are woven fine, white, silken fibres of some unidentified plant. Some of the green pine needles also grow out through the substance of the nest and others again are turned back and woven into the cotton, the whole effect being very pretty. Close to the brim a few fine straws are wreathed about, and the lining consists of extremely fine fibres. The inside dimensions are one and a half inches in depth and width. This nest contained four incubated eggs; they closely resemble a set of Field Sparrow's eggs in my collection. The birds were quite shy in this case, and it was only by close watching that they were identified.

*Nest No. 4* is situated also in what seems to be the usual position, against the side of the upright stem of a little hickory bush, firmly supported by three small twigs coming off irregularly from the main stem, about half an inch apart, at different angles. It is made less neatly than usual, of a quantity of plant-fibres, a little cedar bark in fine strips, one dried leaf, and several projecting white feathers. This nest is lined with fine straws, a little hair, and a few small feathers. The inside measurements are the same as those of No. 3. There is a considerable gap in the brim where it rests against the upright support, and the whole structure is less cleanly cupped than in other cases. The nest contained four fresh eggs. I almost touched the mother bird before she would fly. She left without a sound, and did not return during the few moments I was there. Perhaps she went with the news in search of her mate, who may have been amusing himself in the shady woods at some distance.

*Nest No. 5.* This specimen is at once the most compactly woven and most irregularly shaped of the five. The situation also is unusual; it is placed in a mass of grapevine twigs, about three feet from the ground. It is composed of the usual silky plant fibres (perhaps of a species of *Asclepias*), thin shreds of inner cedar bark, and fine grass straws, and is lined with still finer straws and a little horsehair. Besides being the most

irregular, it is also the shallowest nest I have seen, being only about one inch deep inside by one and three-quarters inches across. The shape of the construction no doubt depends upon the site, as the bunch of grapevine twigs affords a foundation very different from an upright or oblique crotch. The brim is also exceptionally formed of seven comparatively large brown feathers about three inches long, all woven in for about two-thirds of their length, excepting one which is woven only at the tip, the rest of its length being simply laid down upon the brim of the nest. Thus six of the feathers protrude for about an inch above the brim, giving it a rough, bristling appearance, especially since it is the quill-end of each of these feathers that sticks up. This nest contained three eggs, incubation of which had just begun. The bird left it quietly on my near approach, and with her mate was seen hopping unconcernedly about as long as I stayed.

The nests here described and also others examined have nearly the same capacity (average depth and diameter both about one and a half inches), but vary considerably in outside measurements, owing in part to the different thickness of the walls, in part to their shape as a whole; the latter is influenced in every case, to a greater or less extent, by the direction of the supporting twigs. Exceptions aside, the Prairie Warbler's nest may be characterized as a neat, cup-shaped structure with a firm, somewhat contracted brim, composed of vegetable down or soft fibre mixed with some fine straws and a few leaves or feathers, lined with hair and very fine straws, and placed in an upright or oblique crotch, preferably one formed in part by the main stem of a bush, from one and a half to five feet from the ground, in a rather open, scrubby, hilly locality. The eggs appear to be oftenest four in number, sometimes only three. In no case were five found. They are too well-known by descriptions in standard works to require notice here. I need only add that the identification of the specimens above described is absolute, and that they now form part of my collection.